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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7795
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5734
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1729
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0271
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 2626
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 0846
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 4016
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 002808

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2018

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SUBJECT: ABDUCTEES' FAMILIES DISCUSS CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Representatives of abductee family groups described their high expectations for how Prime Minister Aso will address the abduction issue and contrasted PM Aso's likely approach with that of former PM Fukuda, during a meeting with Embassy Tokyo October 3. In addition, they welcomed the PM's choices for key abduction-related positions. Expressing concern that an opposition DPJ government would not deal with abductions in the same manner as the ruling LDP, the family representatives expressed hope that the Aso administration would remain in power through next year. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Abductees family group chairman Shigeo Iizuka and secretary general Teruaki Masumoto opened their October 3 meeting with Embassy Tokyo by describing their first meeting with Prime Minister Taro Aso, which took place the previous day. (Note: The October 2 meeting was originally scheduled to be with Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura, but the PM made a surprise appearance. End Note.) The PM told the families that he would "take responsibility" for resolving the abductions issue and left the families with the impression that he would renew former Prime Minister Abe's "tough stance" towards the DPRK on this matter. Moreover, according to Masumoto, Aso seemed to indicate that he would go further on the abduction issue than recently resigned Prime Minister Fukuda: rather than by repeating that Japan will "persistently negotiate," as Fukuda did, Aso said he would frequently remind the DPRK that its leader admitted to the abductions and apologized for them in 2002.

¶3. (C) Iizuka said he is "relieved" that Kyoko Nakayama was appointed as PM Aso's Special Advisor for the Abductions Issue. This is because incoming Chief Cabinet Secretary and Minister of State for Abductions Issues Kawamura will be "too busy" with other issues to place any priority on abductions, Iizuka explained. He feels it is encouraging for the families to have both Aso and Nakayama in the administration.

On other personnel appointments, Masumoto offered that he welcomed PM Aso's appointment of Iwao Urura as Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary (DCCS). Urura was previously Director General of the National Police Agency (NPA) under the Abe administration, where he took a tough stance against Chongryon (the association of North Koreans in Japan, and the DPRK's de facto representative office here). The Abe administration had strongly supported police efforts to address the abduction issue by ordering the NPA to enhance its evidence gathering capabilities while expanding its budget. As a result, police were able to gather enough evidence to add Kyoko Matsumoto to the government's list of abductees, Masumoto noted.

¶4. (C) In contrast to PM Aso's commitment, Iizuka said that

former PM Fukuda gave the impression that the abductions issue was like "someone else's problem." Iizuka was disappointed, however, that Fukuda resigned as he did because he had, in fact, made some progress in getting the DPRK to refocus on the abduction issue by agreeing to reinvestigate the abductions in return for a limited lifting of Japanese sanctions. With Fukuda's resignation, it seems that Japan - and the families -- will have to begin again from square one, Iizuka lamented.

¶5. (C) Both Iizuka and Masumoto expressed their hope that the Aso administration will serve its full term until September 2009. While the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is "very active" in trying to resolve the abductions issue, neither the opposition Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) President Ozawa nor its executive members have ever stated clearly the DPJ's stance in addressing the abduction issue, Iizuka said. He questioned whether the DPJ would squarely address the issue should the DPJ come to power. While true that some DPJ members are members of a bipartisan parliamentary league that has taken a hard line against the DPRK, what is of greater importance is how the party would address this issue were it to assume power. Masumoto further pointed out that the DPJ contains former Socialist Party members who are relatively friendly to the DPRK and that most DPJ members seem to think the abductions issue should be settled through dialogue with the DPRK.

¶6. (C) Embassy Political Minister-Counselor stressed the U.S. Government's continuing strong interest in and concern for the abductees and underlined that our consistent message to

TOKYO 00002808 002 OF 002

the DPRK is that the abductions issue must be resolved. As the President and the Ambassador have repeatedly stressed, we will not forget the abductees, and this position has not changed. Iizuka expressed his gratitude and said that it gives him and the other family members great comfort to meet regularly with the Embassy and to know that the U.S. Government and the Ambassador continue to be concerned about the abductees and their families.

SCHIEFFER